

IndyCar Media Conference

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Josef Newgarden Simon Pagenaud Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 DXC Technology Team Penske Chevrolet who qualified second for tomorrow's race. That matches his best start here, starting second in 2015 in his first year with Team Penske.

Simon, you're familiar with starting on the front row in this race. What are your thoughts heading into tomorrow night's race and the speed your car has?

SIMON PAGENAUD: We seem to qualify front row pretty much every oval. We missed the pole on three ovals so far by a little bit.

It was a fantastic effort from the whole 22 team. We had a bit of a tough practice this morning. We managed to make the right changes for this afternoon qualifying.

I held my breath for those two laps. Managed to keep the pedal to the floor the whole time. The handling was really good. Thanks to my engineer for sorting that out.

Obviously it's super important for us to do well this weekend for DXC. It's an incredible partner we have. You guys don't what they do, they do all the data and analytics for the race team, basically get all the information from the cars, the other teammates for us as soon as possible to be successful on the racetrack. They're obviously a leader in their industry, just like Team Penske. Having these two together is a Dream Team. We couldn't be happier to have them onboard and be here as the title sponsor, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Not only a strong performance for you and your car, but also 1-2-3 with your teammates. The last time you qualified 1-2-3 was at Sonoma last year. The team also finished 1-2-3 in that race. Talk about the strength of Team Penske qualifying well on ovals this year.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think obviously the oval performance this year is outstanding, Will just winning the Indy 500. We've been very successful, very strong on all ovals so far. Detroit was not an easy weekend, but we're bouncing back. That's what this team does best.

It's amazing to see 1-2-3. I'm sure Roger will be very

happy, which is what we want essentially. But, yeah, the team is just very good at finding speed at this speedway. Without Team Chevy we can't do it, so thanks to them for the horsepower on these tracks.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. (Question regarding speed on warmup lap.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I didn't really know what I was going to get because we made some changes on the car. I wasn't very comfortable this morning, and I didn't know how the car was going to be. I had no idea of the balance. I never went flat out through turn one before.

Sometimes when I'm in this situation, the best thing for me to do is just go flat out and see what happens. I rarely do it, but I often do it in qualify. It's just a way for me to understand what I've got.

Q. Can you talk about how this car handles with the universal kit, what you expect to see when it's cooler during the race to set up for a pass.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think this morning was the worst situation you're going to see it. The track was really dusty, really green, low grip. The temperature was really high. The tires were sliding around, which is what happens in these kind of temperatures. Remember, it's 100 degrees today, so the racetrack is really hot.

I thought this morning it was very much down to the driver. We had to lift in turn one and two. The best driver, obviously the one that can set up his racecar the best, is going to be the fastest. I think that's how it should be. It shouldn't be flat out all the way around because it's just no driving to it.

The biggest thing is IndyCar decided not to have pack racing here for the safety of the drivers and for the good of the series. They've decided to go with this aero kit, which is universal, the same for everybody. The cars look really good. They drive well. You just have to adapt to it really.

I think at the end of the day we all have the same thing, so you just have to be best at it and find ways to be the best. It's definitely not easy, but we don't want it to be easy for everyone because everybody could do it. You want to deserve your seat. You want to deserve your position as a racecar driver. I think today it's definitely tough. But I welcome the chance.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, congratulations. Good luck tomorrow.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by our pole winner, Josef Newgarden, also our defending series champion, who will start from pole in tomorrow's race. A new best start for Josef here at Texas Motor Speedway, his first pole here, also his first Superspeedway pole.

You've seen a good bit of success on the shorter ovals, but the superspeedways have eluded you so far. How do you feel about your chances tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think it helps a lot. It's very warm. I don't think I saw a person not sweating outside. We're dealing with the heat. I think this is a big boost for us particularly coming off of Detroit. It was a tough weekend for us on the 1 car side. I don't think it was the best weekend as a whole for Team Penske.

We fought all weekend. To come here and have speed in all the racecars is really nice. I think it comes down to a lot of things, the team, the personnel we have. We have some of the best people in the paddock. You can see that. When you have cars go 1-2-3, it shows the competitiveness of all the cars.

That's the thing that impresses me most about the team, is how competitive they make each car they have. They're really, really good at that. It's a big credit to Team Penske.

Team Chevy as well, if you look at the speed we've had during the month of May, the 500. It helped us secure the pole today. That's a big part of it. Now that we have good speed, we have to figure out how to make the car last on tires. That is definitely the big deal tomorrow night. If we can do that, we're going to be just fine, find ourselves back in Victory Lane.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the tires and maintaining them with the heat. What are some other things that go into preparing for as hot of a race as we're expecting tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, obviously it's going to change. It will change from sort of the early evening to full evening time when the sun goes down and the track cools off. Track temperature is really the biggest thing. This car is more sensitive to track temperature because of the predominance of the floor from an aerodynamic standpoint. Looking after the tires I think will be more of an equation this year.

We worked really well with Firestone to make a great racing product here. Firestone, they normally make

tires that are sometimes bulletproof which is a good thing. They know how to make really good race tires. For a show, we're trying to optimize exactly what drivers want, fans want. I think you'll get a mix of both.

Off the initial feel of the racecar, it's a car that you can race and follow closely with, it feels that way at least, with a couple cars. After you get 20, 30 laps on the tires, I think it will get tougher. Guys will have to work to maintain the balance they want in the car, maintain the tire life. As a racecar driver, you want that around a track like this, where you have to work to make the racecar better, to last for the full stint.

Maybe that changes slightly. I haven't driven the car tonight. Once we do that, have a full session with everybody, maybe we'll have a little better insight. I do think we're going to have a great race. Everyone has done a good job trying to making that.

THE MODERATOR: How helpful is the night session knowing those are the conditions you'll be racing in tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's critical. You want to run in the conditions that you're going to race in. Basically you're going to get a preview of the start of the race, then it's a little bit of a guessing game of how it's going to change going into the night. You have to try to predict what the track temperature is going to be, how that is going to affect the car. We get an idea of what it's like to run in one- or two-car packs or 10-car packs. You have to have that information before going into the race.

Guys are probably going to do full tank runs to try to run the tires out, see what they've got. Whoever does the best job of hanging on to them throughout the race, I think that's going to be your winner. That's normally the case around this place.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. For the second year in a row, this seems to be the most unpredictable race going in. Drivers can't tell you what to expect tomorrow night. Where do you stand on what you've seen so far of the package with this track?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think it depends on what you want. Ideally I think if you have a good race, the start of the tire life, you have 10, 15, 20 laps where guys are really fighting, then it starts to string out. That's been a good mix for us personally. That's what I like around Texas, is where you can fight people in a pack, but then you really have to start working on the tires after that, try to make the car last. That's what I predict is going to happen. Maybe that will change a little bit after we have wear on the tire.

Every track we've been to has been so different with this car. We haven't run on a track like Texas. It's hard

to compare it to Indianapolis because they're two different beasts. Because we haven't run here with this car, this tire, it's a little hard to predict at this point.

Q. With the reduction in downforce, can you feel the rear-end breaking away a lot more now?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say so, yeah.

Q. Last year you went three-wide, then suddenly snapped on you. Could you actually feel a lot more progressive?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think that was more down to my mistake. There was obviously a quick (indiscernible) up in that third lane. I think that's more what contributed to the wreck last year. Going up there at the wrong time was really the mistake.

But to answer your question, yes, I do think you can really feel the car a lot more. You get a lot more warning. We overstepped the balance there in practice this morning, the car was violently loose. I thought it was wrecking a couple different times. I could feel where it was at, I could nurse it back to the pits at least.

It's comforting knowing you have more warning for where the car is at, what it's going to do. So, yeah, I think you do. Even in qualifying there, I was pretty neutral. The car was just about right, but it was on the edge for where the downforce was at, I thought. I could feel where the car was sliding at. It's not these quick, violent snaps, but a little bit more of a progressive slide. With this car you've been getting that everywhere. If tire dropoff becomes a thing at 35, 40 laps, then guys are going to have a lot easier time hustling the car if it's heavy on the right rear, tires are wearing out. I think we will have an easier time.

Q. I heard a common refrain that you're disagreeing with, drivers said they couldn't really feel the car at all, they felt it was sitting on top of the track, not getting into it. Have you solved that problem?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it feels like light downforce to me. When the car is not glued to the track, you're going to feel more the mechanical side. I think guys are just feeling the loss of downforce. There's quite a bit less than last year.

The other thing that is probably a contributing factor is we haven't had a ton of time on it. I think these guys need a little bit more time of working on their racecars. I had the advantage of being here. I came during the tire test. I sort of already knew what to expect coming into it.

I think people that haven't run yet, having an hour isn't enough. They're going to have another hour tonight to make the racecars better. I think once they get used to the downforce being off the car, they'll feel better about it. I haven't had any big feel problems. I could feel what the racecar is doing just fine. It's light on downforce. It's a handful. That's what you're going to

get.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, congratulations. Good luck tomorrow night.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you.